

Item 12C: _City Council Speakers' Bureau

WHY? In September I proposed that we try to reach out to those who are not “plugged in” to City Council deliberations and actions or City government in general. The purpose is to educate the public about the issues facing the City Council, the deliberations of the Council, the constraints within which the Council does its work, and the approaches we take to make decisions.

WHO? The underlying presumption is that there are some citizens pretty well tuned in to Council deliberations. These are the people who show up at our meetings or belong to organizations which are themselves tuned in to what we do: Chamber of Commerce, Lafayette Homeowners Council, Taxpayers Association, City commissions, some school organizations, and a few special interest groups. We already speak to or otherwise interact with such groups. Arranging more speaking engagements with such folk might be useful to persuade to a particular viewpoint, but would not accomplish fundamental education as to the process and how we approach it. They already know that.

A second group consists of people who do not follow closely the actions of the City Council, but are generally satisfied with what we do and assume that when we ask for their participation, by vote or by action, it is an undertaking worthy of their support.

A third group consists of people who do not follow closely the actions of the City Council, and are generally suspicious of governmental action. Judging from the survey of voters after the June ballot, these folks believe the Council has dysfunctional priorities, particularly about where money should be spent, believe that we have far more resources and/or flexibility in the application of resources than we actually do, or believe we have made one or more demonstrably wrong decisions in the recent past.

TARGET AUDIENCES. While a Speakers Bureau might be a convenient way of scheduling or providing topics for presentations to the Chamber or the Homeowners Council, they would not be the focus of any outreach.

The Speakers Bureau would make Councilmembers available to groups and venues where we would find citizens not usually in touch with our activities. It would actively seek out opportunities to engage and inform such citizens. There are two ways to engage the unengaged. One is to invite the public to open presentations by Councilmembers. Unfortunately, such invitations would normally find a response primarily from the group of citizens who are already interested in local government. I suspect that is why previous attempts to attract participants to such events were poorly attended.

The other way to engage the unengaged is to find them where they gather for purposes unrelated to City government. A list might start with these:

- Schools – presentations could be made in schools themselves, especially high schools, where the students might be informed enough to form understandings that they might pass on to their parents and teachers. School parents' organizations would also be effective, especially reaching

younger parents who are not as involved in or aware of local government, on average, as older citizens.

- Churches – my church has a monthly Men's Breakfast (open to all), singles group, Development Committee, and probably a few others that are looking for interesting programming. I'm sure other churches do, too.
- Neighborhood Homeowners Associations – not the LHC, who are already plugged in, but smaller groups that may have only one or two members who are really connected to City government.
- Civic Clubs – Lions, Rotary, Odd-Fellows, whatever. These groups have broad interests, but civic governance is often one area of interest.
- Business Groups – The Chamber is well-informed, but there may be other groups focused on a particular area or type of business, who may not yet have a focus on their interaction with the City.
- Others – If I knew what they were, I'd have another category.

ENGAGEMENT. The purpose is to inform, but also to engage, to give a point of contact with City government to people who haven't had any personal government contact. Our participation would be outside the usual focus of their activities, so simply making our availability known through the City website and the local newspapers may convince some people to ask for a speaker, but may not attract so many. It may be necessary to also target some of the groups above and contact them directly to offer speakers, either by personal contact or mailers.

It is hard to anticipate how popular such a program might be, but I think it would be reasonable to limit the number of presentations to 1/councilmember/month, although the participation would obviously be up to the individual councilmembers.

FORMAT. I would anticipate that the best format would be to have a 10-15 minute presentation prepared on a few topics. The sponsoring group could pick their topic (we might even offer a series of 2-3 talks if it is a large and interested group). The presentation would be followed by a Q&A period, which could be limited to the topic or (my preference) be open to any questions. The broader Q&A would provide better feedback on public concerns that we may not currently understand, and we can always offer to get back to the questioner when we have no answers for them.

TOPICS. I would hope staff could help to put together the basic presentations, perhaps with a power-point format. Could we dedicate a laptop and a projector? The topics that occur to me are:

City Budget: The recent Oscar-worthy effort by staff would be an appropriate intro here.

Redevelopment Agency

Current Issues and Developments (Roads, Police, Library, Development)

Downtown Strategic Plan

City Planning

Some would be pretty generic and others would have to be updated periodically.
We could start out with a very limited menu of just one or two topics.

Let me know what you think.

Brandt Andersson